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## AFRICAN MORINGA

African Moringa Tree, Cabbage Tree, Malung-gay, Murunga-Kai, Sohnja

*Moringa stenopetala*

Moringaceae – Moringa family

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### ECHO PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

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**ORIGIN** – *Moringa stenopetala* is often referred to as the African Moringa Tree because it is native only to Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Though it does grow in many other parts of the old- and new-world tropics, it is not as widely known as its close relative, *Moringa oleifera*.

**USES** – All parts of the tree except the wood are edible, providing a highly nutritious food for both humans and animals. The flowers are a good nectar source for honey and the seeds are a rich oil source for cooking and lubricant uses. Many parts of the plant have been used in medicinal preparations. Whole plants have been used as living hedges, fences, and windbreaks. The wood is very soft; useful for paper but makes low-grade firewood and poor charcoal. Attracting attention in recent decades is the use of the dried, crushed seeds as a coagulant similar to the chemical alum. Even very muddy water can be cleared when crushed seeds are added. Solid matter and some bacteria will coagulate and then sink to the bottom of a container. The cleaned water can then be poured off and boiled. Use 100 milligrams (about 1 to 1 ½ seeds) of crushed seed to clean 1 liter (1 quart) of muddy water.

**CULTIVATION** – In Ethiopia, *Moringa stenopetala* grows wild in elevations between 1,000 and 1,800 m (3,000-5,400 ft), and it will grow as high as 2000 m (6,000 ft). Light frosts will do it no harm. Freezes, though, may cause it to die back to ground level, where new sprouts may be produced. *M. stenopetala* is more drought tolerant than *M. oleifera*. Full sun is normal, though partial shade is tolerated. Plant seeds about 2 cm (1 in) deep in soil that is moist but not too wet. Sprouting occurs normally in 1-2 weeks. It can be allowed to grow for shade (6-15 m/18-45 ft), or kept low (about 1-1.5 m/3-4.5 ft) for easier harvesting.

**HARVESTING AND SEED PRODUCTION** – Harvest very young whole plants, young leaves and even older leaflets and flowers for food. Pick the slender young pods (referred to as drumsticks) for use like green beans. Seeds of older pods may be shelled from the pods and cooked like green peas. Harvest ripe pods for the mature seeds. Repeatedly prune the older flowering branches to stimulate production of new branch shoots as additional sources of leaf harvest material.

**PESTS AND DISEASES** – *Moringa* is resistant to most pests, though root rot can occur if the soil is too wet.

**COOKING AND NUTRITION** – *Moringa* foliage and fruit pods are rich sources of calcium and iron, and good sources of vitamins B, A, and C (when raw) and of protein (including goodly amounts of the sulfur-containing amino acids, methionine and cystine). *M. stenopetala* leaves are larger and more appealing in appearance than those of *M. oleifera*. Both young and older leaves are edible, though older ones are milder and more tender. They can be cooked in stews, soups, and stir-fries, or boiled as spinach. Young pods may be cooked, offering a flavor similar to asparagus. Immature seeds are often cooked and eaten as a fresh vegetable, while mature seeds can be dried and roasted. The flowers can be cooked or oven-dried and steeped as tea. Store dried leaves as future soup or sauce supplements. Blossoms are edible; they taste about like radish. Browning seeds from mature pods in a skillet, mashing them, and placing them in boiling water causes an excellent cooking or lubricating oil (very similar to olive oil) to float to the surface. The oil preserves well although does become rancid with age. If you would like *Moringa* recipes write to ECHO requesting the technical note, "Moringa Recipes".